Traditional Marriages in Rural Balochistan: The Voice of Baloch Women

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Abstract:
Marriage is an essential and universal socially accepted institution that indicates the pattern of civilised society. It is the bond between two individuals to form a family. It is recommended by many religions for the sake of eradicating the social evils of society. However, the traditional marriages which occur on the basis of a violation of individual rights, give air to hostile social situations. This study aimed to explore the views of Baloch women regarding the consequences of traditional marriages on their lives. The study was undertaken in 4 villages of Punjahee sub-tehsil of Balochistan, Pakistan, focused on 20 women informants. The data were collected through focused group discussion. The study sensed traditional marriages are due to the deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, illiteracy, and preference of the male child, therefore these traditions put women in a disadvantaged position. It is highly recommended that NGOs and GOs play a better role in the awareness of the parents and implementation of the laws regarding the rights of women so that they can lead better-privileged lives, with the help of religious scholars and media.

Keywords: Traditional Marriages, Balochistan, Focused Group Discussion.

Introduction
Marriage is the institution, which is universally and legally accepted and practiced in every culture in any society (Nair, 2006). It is an agreement and a life contract for observing familial relations between two individuals (Bankole et al., 2004). The mate selection for the marriage is the riskiest decision of the people, which in the case of dissatisfaction immerse individuals in polygamous or unacceptable relationships (Fisman et al., 2006) (Cartwright & Cooper, 1993). The pattern of marriages differs from culture to culture, however; the traditional marriages are characterised by early age marriages, forced marriages, endogamy and polygamous marriages (Laws, 2013). These traditional marriages are commonly in practice in the almost majority of the developing countries, which place women in a disadvantaged position (Kabir, 2006). Moreover, these commonly practiced, centuries old traditional marriages define the future of all male dominating societies of South Asia (UNDESA, 2000). In Pakistan, where male enjoys a dominant and privileged status, in such social environment, women do not have the right or power to decide or select their life partners (Naz & Rehman, 2011). Naz, Khan, Daraz, Hussain & Chaudhry (2012) mentioned in their study that the tribal people of Pakistan are more traditional than being Islamic, although Islam gave the right to women to select or reject the partner on the basis of any ground, but traditional male dominating society where women are subjugated, deny the trend of self-decision making in the selection of mates and discourage the practice of love marriages, and emphasize on the execution of traditional marriages. In rural set ups where the traditional norms are strictly in practice, the nature of these ceremonies is sensed as forced marriages where the weaker segment like women cannot take a bold step against the enforced decisions (Macfarlane, 2002). The evidence can be witnessed from the previous scholarly writings where it is mentioned that 57 % of the population in Pakistan got trapped in the custom of early age marriage - below the age of fifteen (NCTPE, 2003). Similarly, the traditional societies of Pakistan have ethnocentric beliefs on the purity of their ancestral blood which does not allow them to get mixed with any non-ethnic (apart from their own) group for the sake of getting married which results in forced marriages or endogamy without noticing the compatibility of the individuals who are supposed to be wed (Naz et al., 2012). The traditional marriages are reasoned to defend the honor and status of the family, regulating the kinship bonds and some for economic lifting (Rawson, 2000). In Pakistan, refusing the marriage partner decided by family is considered a major violation of traditional norm which results in honor killing (Babur, 2007). In Balochistan, these trends are highly appreciated.
and are in practice than any regions of the country (Taylor, 1993). However, the consequences of such traditional marriages are hostile to the women not only socially, but also affect the lives of the next generation (IPPF, 2000). It is concluded that the women bear the aftermaths of traditional marriages which also unstable the structure of the family structure and society.

**Background:**
The social structure of Balochistan is mostly tribal based on the clan system and the followers of this system are highly concerned about their cultural traditions and their prestige (Sajid & Sadiq, 2016) (Majeed, 2010). The ethnocentric values, love, and respect towards their traditions and culture, labeled the people of this region as the most conservative community (Paterson, 2008). As likely the other parts of Pakistan, this region of Balochistan, also hosts a male-dominated society where women have limited power of decision making in every sphere of life (Kakar et al. 2016). Due to the exceeded authority of the tribal men, women are kept deprived, consequently, the basic rights of women are violated in every step (Umer, Othman & Hassan, 2016). Such violation can be observed by the pattern of traditional marriages in the region, the footprints of traditional marriages are witnessed in rural areas, where marriages are arranged to settle the disputes or blood battles between two tribes (Shaheed, 1990). The women bear the consequences of such marriages by having no right of divorce (Naz, 2011). C.N (2000), mentioned that the average age difference in Pakistan between the spouses is 10.1, this age difference further limits the freedom of mobility, the power of decision making and also responsible for the economically disadvantaged status of the women (Khan & Naz, 2012). The dominating and privileged position of men kept women in the state of poverty and dependency, however, the married women are affected by the domestic violence and lower socioeconomic position (Naz, 2011). (Mensch, 1998) also mentioned in his study that the domestic violence is the cause and result of forced marriages, such type of marriages can further promote social evils and prostitutes in the society. However, Balochistan, being a strict traditional society where married women cannot raise their voices against the domestic violence or in other words such cases are never reported accordingly to the frequency they occur (Bhatti, Jamali, Phulpoto, Mehmoord & Shaikh, 2011). Furthermore, the previous records show that the girls who get married before they reach the age of 18 faces serious complication during pregnancy, which further results in maternal mortality (Whitehead, 2001). Similarly, highlighting the same point, (Baloch, 2016) mentioned in her study that in Baloch community the maternal mortality in the highest in the world. Daraz, Naz, & Khan, (2014) mentioned that the traditional social structure enforces traditional marriages (as like early marriage) which affect the health as well as the social life of the whole family, and compel women to live a deprived and dependent life. Finally, it is revealed that a traditional marriage promotes disempowerment of women in society, which not only affect the women, but the next coming generation is also at high risk.

**Feminist theory:**
The present study used feminist theory as supporting the theory because it helps to link the status of women in a male-dominated society. The feminist theory deals with the interests and rights of women as well as an equitable distribution of power and resources between men and women in a society. From the feminist point of view, women are equal to men and have a right to the same treatment (Hughes, 2002). Feminist theory inspires women to acquire economical roles as mothers, wives, and daughters. Equal treatment of women, as well as equal distribution of resources, encourages women to empowerment and vigorous participation in the society Majali (2012), The study uses the feminist approach to address the situation of women in society and to highlight the impact of traditional marriages in restricting women’s participation in social affairs.

**Methodology:**
The current study was conducted in four villages’ Killi Umer Abad, Killi Sardar Nabi Bakhsh, Killi Shadeni and Killi Muhammad Khan of Punjpahee (Sub-Tehsil Quetta) Balochistan, Pakistan. In these villages, the homogeneous customs of traditional marriages are highly practiced by tribal men that are one of the reasons of women lower position. For this study, four focus group discussions were held among female informants recommended by Carlse n and Glenton (2011). The reason for dividing into four groups was that the villages were quiet in distance from each other, so five informants from each village made a group and so on. Each focus group discussion took almost 90 minutes. The personal data of informants were collected at the time of opening the discussion. The informants discussed freely the basis and the consequences of their marriages, while few young women were reserved in the beginning. The questions which were aimed to discuss in this group discussion were pre-selected. Through integrity activity, the discussion was started from general affairs and issues regarding health education and village environment and later the discussion took turn specifically about their own lives, the reasons of their marriage bonding and the consequences of the type of marriage on their lives, family and children. The data were initially transcribed after transcription notes have been taken to explain the phenomena being studied from the data.

**Table: Profile of informants (women)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Selected Groups</th>
<th>Rural Area</th>
<th>Ethnic Identification</th>
<th>Informant</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Level of Education</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>Basis of Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group A:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Early age marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Killi Umer Abad) Village</td>
<td>Umer Brahvi (Baloch)</td>
<td></td>
<td>I²</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Endogamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I³</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Forced marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I⁴</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygyny (polygamy)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I⁵</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cross marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group B:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I⁶</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygamy (second wife)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Killi Sardar Nabi Bakhsh) Village</td>
<td>Brahvi (Baloch)</td>
<td></td>
<td>I⁷</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygamy (second one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I⁸</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygamy (first among 3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I⁹</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Forced marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁰</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Widow</td>
<td>Cross marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group C:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹¹</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Endogamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Killi Shadeni) Village</td>
<td>Brahvi (Baloch)</td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹²</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygamy (second wife)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹³</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>Secondary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Early age marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁴</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygamy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁵</td>
<td>59</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Polygamy (first wife)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Group D:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁶</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Early age marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Killi Muhammad Khan) Village</td>
<td>Brahvi (Baloch)</td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁷</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Cross marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁸</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Forced marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>I¹⁹</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Illiterate</td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Endogamy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operational definition of terms

Tribe: The Tribe is an ethnic group consisting of families and communities linked by social, economic, religious or blood ties, sharing a common way of life, headed by a well-known person called Sardar or Nawab (tribal head).

Traditions: Traditions are the expected ways of lives or codes of conduct which are practiced from generation to generation through the process of transmission by the descendants.

Cross marriage or Watta Satta: is known as bride exchange marriages that are commonly practiced in South Asian countries. Such type of marriages involves the simultaneous marriage of a brother-sister pair from two households.

Polygamy: the practice or custom of having more than one wife or husband at the same time

Endogamy the custom of marrying only within the limits of a local community, clan, or tribe.

Killi: Killies are the neighborhood. People from the same tribe prefer to live together.

Key Findings:
The previous study of Umer, Othman, and Hassan (2016) mentioned that Balochistan is the region where tribal norms are strictly followed or implement in such social situation men and women are bound to the customary norms of the tribe. The result of the current study also verifies their statement, where the traditional marriages are strongly in practice. For this study, the key findings were collected by the focus group discussion. The women accordingly their marriage experiences mentioned some points which prompted a lower position in the society.

Figure 1: Key Findings of Focused Group Discussion

Source: Authors
The focus discussion revealed that the customary practices of traditional marriages promoted bulk of social issues, which not only affect the women live but distress the structure of the family and next generation also face serious circumstances in future. Moreover, it was mentioned that the traditional marriages are due to the deeply rooted socio-cultural norms, illiteracy, and preference of the male child, these marriages most of the time are arranged without the willingness of women. Without noticing the compatibility of the man and woman, who is supposed to get married. Such type of marriages, they named the bonding of compromise, in which the parents of the girl teach the lesson of compromise and adjustment at any cost. On the other hand, if a girl gets married in early age, it causes serious health issues. In the early age, an immature girl conceives a baby, that further cause complication in delivery. Which is not only dangerous for her life, but it also puts child life in danger. Traditional marriages like polygamy or cross marriages (Watta Satta) also promote instability in family affairs. Group 2 stated some points by mentioning that

“We live in joint family... I am the second wife of my husband and it was (Watta Satta marriage [cross marriage], I was married to my husband to make a successful marriage of my brother and the same time my husband was the only brother so there was no option except being the second wife of my husband, it is not easy to bear the consequences of others mistakes. If my brother fails to make a happy life by providing all facilities to his wife at home, it directly affects my life, because my sister in law used to complain to my husband and in-laws. I bear the aggression of my husband without complaining to my family. In our society, men are free, whatever they do outside or inside nobody questions them. But for women the rules are different, we don’t have to say our right of decision making is denied, we cannot select or reject any proposal all are decided by male members of the family. (G2)

It was revealed that social injustice and domestic violence are coupled together with the families where marriages are based on resolving the disputes between two tribes. Due to negative competition between both the wives the peaceful environment of the family gets in danger. To avoid such tense and disparaging environment, man does not stay at home. And there are more chances of immersion in social evils outside the home. It is believed that women cannot continue education after getting married. In traditional marriages, the women give the sacrifice of her education which compelled her to lead a life of dependency, poor and deprived of basic rights. Group 4 pinpointed some facts

We have extended family set up, and our male members prefer to cousin to cousin marriages in early age to avoid resistance, cultural and language variations. That’s why we majority of the women in the village never get the chance to go to school, that’s the reason our lives are more difficult and dependent than the others who are educated, they better know how to take care of the kids, their children’s health is also better than our children. People here get two or three times marriages for the sake of male children. If from one wife, he doesn’t get a male child, he keeps marrying other women they don’t care about the number of children and health of women. Secondly, in our home presence of more than one wife also creates some type of jealousy and tension. Such feelings affect the peace of the family. (G4)

One woman shared her experience

I got married at a very early age, my husband was older than me, due to the age difference, there is a lack of understanding and compatibility. That’s the reason women seem more sad and depressed than our men, especially in the case of dispute resolution of marriage. (Participant of group 3).
The analysis of the information thus concludes the customs of traditional marriages tend to adversely affect the lives of the victims by depriving them of the basic rights, including education, better health, mobility and participation in the socio-economic development of their lives. Moreover, such customs encourage socio-psychological issues as like social instability, increases female illiteracy, creates psychological problems, i.e. tension, depression, and anxiety for the women. Besides, such traditional marriages are the serious threats to women’s health and which further promote gender-based violence and creating barriers and hindrances to the empowerment of women in all aspects of life.

In order to decrease the ratio of traditional marriages; it was proposed by women that NGOs (non-governmental organisations) and GOs (governmental organisations) should hold some awareness programs for the parents and tribal people, regarding the rights of the women and the aftermaths of such traditional marriages on the whole family.

Group 1 was suggesting

“As we already mentioned that we are chained with the norms and customs of our culture, where we are unable to change our such traditions [traditional marriages]. Welfare institutions must have some aims to reduce these anti-women traditions by giving awareness programs to our male members, so that our daughters may get their actual right for selecting or rejecting proposals” (G1)

The government should discourage such trends by practically implementing the laws and policies to punish the culprits who marry their women without knowing their verdict of the agreement, which is their legal right given by Islam. NGOs should play a vibrant role to assist the government in highlighting the areas where such traditional marriages are prevailing. It was further suggested that educating parents must be the basic objective of the organisations regarding the rights of women in Islamic perspectives. Islamic lessons regarding women’s rights are the basic key points where the parents can be agreed to change their trends of marriages by giving them the true knowledge of Islam.

Finally, it is deduced from the above facts that the aftermaths of social-cultural factors as traditional marriages, as an impediment to women empowerment, are explained by feminist theory.

**Conclusion**

This study presents the facts that traditional marriages are the accepted and are an essential part of the Baloch culture. Such marriages are highly in practice in rural areas of Balochistan especially the tribal areas as like Punjpahee (rural Balochistan), where traditional informal customs are strongly implemented than formal laws made by any formal agency. The ill-consequences that are drawn-out in the result of traditional marriages, it is measured that such marriages are physically harmful and exploitative for the women more than men, women are the victim of traditional marriages as they are taught the lesson of compromise which further leads the domestic violence. Similarly, the key findings of this study show that the traditional marriages promote a deprived and discouraged life, where a woman has to bear domestic violence without complaint, a woman has to suppress her inner abilities to get the education, which further compels them to live a subjugated life. The flag of male dominance can never be bowed down to the practice of these marriages is dispirited. For the lifting of development and empowerment, it is a prerequisite to avoid the gender inequality, high health risks, domestic violence, social isolation, and poverty, which is only possible if a woman owns her life by having the power of decision making for her life. NGOs and GOs with the help of religious scholars can reduce the ratio of traditional marriages through corner meetings awareness programs and TV talk shows. It is essential to embroil the religious scholars because the rigidity of tribal customs can be abated only by the teachings of
Quran and Sunnah. For coping up with the international poverty, it is essential to bring revolutionary changes in these traditions and in women’s lives by empowering them.

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